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ABSTRACT

Project Reading for Educational Achievement and Development (READ) uses community resource people to motivate at-risk minority group high school females to persist in their academic endeavors and develop their abilities. First conducted in the Santa Monica (California) Unified School District, this lunchtime program focuses on improving student attitudes towards reading, school, and literacy. Community members lead discussions on topics of interest to the students, incorporating written materials selected by the speaker, and students wrap up the discussion with a written exercise. The Project also developed a videotape of librarians interacting in the library with minority females and an accompanying teacher's guide. Evaluation information was gathered from pre- and posttest scores on the Demos D attitude scale and from responses to a student questionnaire. The following findings are reported: (1) attitudes towards education and school improved significantly; (2) attitudes towards peers and parents improved significantly, but attitudes towards teachers declined; (3) students reported more frequent use of the library and an increase in ownership of library cards; and (4) students reported increased interest in tutorial programs. An advisory committee that reviewed the videotape and teacher's guide recommended the addition of more detailed information. The following materials are appended: (1) a list of six references; (2) three tables of statistical data; (3) an 11-item bibliography; and (4) a questionnaire for assessing the videotape. (FMW)

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INTRODUCTION AND THEORY

Limited educational opportunities often coupled with ineffective learning skills and strategies have severely negatively impacted the educational attainments of minority females. Perhaps the most insurmountable barrier presently confronting far too many minority females is weak or deficient literacy skills. Members of society with limited literacy skills are most often isolated, disenfranchised, and dependent upon programs of social support for their survival (Harris & Sipay, 1990). To help eradicate the barrier of illiteracy, Project Read (funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education Women's Educational Equity Program) attempted to encourage the development of effective literacy skills among minority females by directly fostering attitudes and experiences conducive to literacy enhancement.

This was **not**: a skill development program
a classroom based program
a program concerned with raising test scores

This intervention is aimed at attitudes about reading, school and literacy in general. Theoretical perspectives all seem to agree that there are three components of attitudes: affect, cognition and latent tendencies (Horne, 1985)). Affect encompasses how we feel about the object (e.g., reading is exciting, enjoyable, fills hours with pleasure). Cognition refers to what we know, or think we know about the object (e.g., reading is relevant to our lives, is a subsistence skill, facilitates self-improvement) These

are the two areas we attempted to impact directly, and hypothesized that these would mediate future behavior relative to literacy activities. Alternative, behavioral approaches (e.g., rewards for completing homework, reading a certain number of books) sometimes have limited generalizability, or do not impact the behavior of the at-risk student (Kazdin, 1985). The unaddressed issue, we feel, is the fundamental attitude toward reading/literacy.

We agree with Mcgiure and others that attitudes are learned predispositions (Horne, 1985). As learned behavior, they are amenable to psychoeducational intervention. Consistent with schema theory (Crocker, Fiske, & Taylor, 1984), the intervention shares the perspective that attitudes function to simplify and categorize sensory and knowledge input (e.g., all reading is boring, school is not helping me). Thus the unmotivated student may be responding from a preconceived attitudinal set, rather than a constant evaluation of the material provided. However, the more interaction an individual is provided with the objects of the attitude (e.g., reading/literacy activities) which serves to disconfirm the preconceived attitude, the more likely it becomes that attitude will change (Crocker, et al., 1984).

INTERVENTION CURRICULUM

The primary purpose of this project was to field test an intervention which motivates minority high school females to persist in their academic endeavors, develop their learning skills

and abilities, and utilize the appropriate community resources available to aid their efforts. The program targets females with weak or deficient literacy skills and/or those at greatest risk for dropping out without additional assistence to achieve literacy. Attitude change is attempted by inviting successful minority role models who have overcome a number of barriers to achieve academic competence and material success to come and share with students their experiences, successes, and collected wisdom. The presentations are informal discussions which are structured to maximize students' participation. Presenters are briefed prior to their session. In this orientation they are requested to develop a series of questions for the students (e.g., how do you think a person goes about opening up a beauty salon?). Printed materials (e.g.magazine articles, biographies, favorite inspirational stories, poetry, novels) which are selected by the presenter, are incorporated into the context of each of these discussions. Each session also provided some sort of language based activity. For example, the cosmetologist brought in and read an article on skin care from Teen Magazine. The students then generated their own written list of beauty tips to share with one another. The immediately relevant presentations and materials are considered highly likely to encourage students to interact with print materials, to perceive the importance of literacy skills to their own lives and success, and to develop an appreciation of the pleasure of reading. We also developed a teacher's resource guide

to facilitate the replication of this model program in other schools and communities across the country.

Another part of this project, above and beyond the intervention curriculum, was the creation of a videotaped presentation. Two minority female professional librarians were videotaped interacting with minority female teens in the library. The presentation is intended as a model for other developing programs, as a resource for the local site in which the intervention is actually implemented, and as a motivational device for student participants.

EVALUATION STUDY

Project Read was first conducted in Santa Monica Unified School District, one of many urban districts in this country currently undergoing rapid changes in the ethnic and demographic composition of its student body. Minority females (90% Latina) within Santa Monica High School were identified as potential participants in the program through a combination of school referral, peer referral, and self referral. Project staff spent approximately 2 weeks prior to the start of the program on the site, talking with students and staff about the program. We identified and specifically invited (through the mail) a pool of 50 10th and 11th graders. We emphasized, however, that everyone was welcome to bring a friend. Over the course of the spring semester (February through June), female students attended 15 weekly

sessions held during luchtime under the general title "Looking Good". Successful minority role models who were invited to come included a film actress, a lawyer, several entreperneurs, journalists, models, corporate employees, and creative artists. When possible, speakers were graduates of Santa Monica High School or residents of the local community. The intervention was hypothesized to increase positive attitudes toward education and school behavior in students who attended more than 60% of the sessions.

EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Two instruments, one standardized and one program specific, were administered to the participants of the structured intervention program. During the first and last sessions, the Demos D Scale (Demos, 1965) was completed by all students in attendance. The Demos D scale is a standardized measure of student attitudes on four dimensions (4 subscales are derived): atttudes toward education, attitudes toward teachers, attitudes toward school behavior, and attitudes toward peer and parent influences on school experiences. This scale operationalizes attitudes as dispositions to act in a particular manner, thus scores are useful in the prediction of various school behaviors, eg. dropping out, affiliating with school activities, displaying appropriate school behavior.

The instrument consists of 29 items with a fifth grade

readability. Each item is phrased as a statement of opinion (eg. "School subjects are very interesting") which students are asked to rate on a successive interval scale ranging from "nearly always" to "nearly never". Thus the scale records verba;l expressions of student attitudes toward school and education. The instrument takes fifteen minutes to complete, and requires less than ten minutes per protocol to score.

The Demos Scale manual reports a test-retest reliability coefficient ranging from +.50 to +.86, which seems more than sufficient for an intervention of the duration of Project Read. Face validity and content validity were established by a panel of sixty-nine judges, described as "psychological experts" (Demos D Scale manual, p. 3). All proposed items were judged prior to inclusion according to criteria of relevance and clarity. Demos D scores have been shown, using discriminant function analysis, to reliably discriminate between high school dropouts and nondropouts.

The scale was included as an evaluation instrument for Project Read due to its direct applicability to the stated objectives of the program. The scores derived from this measure can be subjected to statistical analysis in order to assess the efficacy of the intervention in fostering positive attitudes toward literacy and schooling. As a standardized attitude measure with known psychometric properties, this instrument provided useful information in conjunction with direct observation and evaluation feedback regarding session content. The ease of administration,

scoring, and interpretation of the Demos D scale made it well suited to the needs of Project Read.

An instrument developed specifically for this program by the project evaluator was completed by all students during the fourth session and again during the final session of the intervention. This instrument assessed student satisfaction with the program of presenters, student use of school and community facilities intended to enhance literacy (e.g.,library, peer tutoring project), and general student attutudes toward reading.

> QUESTIONS: What do you like most about coming to Project Read? What topics would you like presented? Have you ever met the school librarian? Do you visit the school library outside of class time? Do you have a Santa Monica Public Library card? Do you enjoy reading? Any particular book, magazine, etc.? Would you be interested in working with a peer tutor to help you with schoolwork?

Another source of project evaluation data came from the community advisory committee. A separate component of the project involved the identification of representatives of institutions and organizations responsible for the development of literacy skills within the targeted community. These representatives were initially convened for the purposes of networking and information exchange to provide a more united community assault on illiteracy.

The body continued to meet in the capacity of an advisory committee for the duration of the intervention project. A total of five school/community organizations were identified within the city of Santa Monica, each of which sent at least one representative (High school, Public Library, Federal Literacy Project, Neighborhood Youth Organization, Latino Resource Center). A total of nine members comprised the community advisory board. Four board meetings were held during the life of the intervention project, allowing community resource personnel to familiarize themselves with the full range of intervention curricula, and to devise means of complementing the in-school intervention with programs from their own agencies (e.g., public library had a series of booktalks on several of the materials first introduced by project speakers).

EVALUATION STUDY FINDINGS

Findings from a comparison of pre- and post-assessmnets on the Demos D attitude scale demonstrated statistically significant differences on all four subscales (see Table 1). A total of 30 students were included in the analysis. Subjects who were not present on both days of assessment, or whose protocols contained missing data, were not included. Data were evaluated using a series of paired sample T-tests to evaluate the differences between group means for pre-and post-measures. The Demos D response scale is comprised of five successive intervals ranging from highly favorable attitude to highly unfavorable attitude (see attachment).

Lower numbers signify more positive attitudes.

As anticipated, the measures of attitudes toward education and attitudes toward school behavior were significantly more positive at post-intervention assessment. Ratings of attitudes toward education decreased from a mean of 16 at pre-test to 14.1 at post-test. Ratings of attitudes toward school behavior decreased from a mean of 11.7 at pre-test to 9.4 at post-test. Though these findings do not represent the results of a controlled laboratory study, the direction of change is highly encouraging.

Attitudes toward peer and parent influences also showed significant change in a positive direction, while attitudes toward teahcers showed a significant decrement. The single instance of negative change occurred in the measure of attitudes toward teachers. Mean ratings rose from 25.4 at pre-test to 27.8 at post-test. One can only speculate as to the causal contribution of the "Looking Good" program to such a decrement in student attitudes. One interesting possibile interpretation is the notion of empowerment. If our minority females were positively inspired to take command of their own academic destiny, they may have become more discriminating consumers of educational services who were more inclined to be critical of the efforts of school site personnel to meet their needs. The example of the "Looking Good" program may have opened the eyes of our young women to possible instructional alternatives. However, an alternative explanation might suggest that June is a time of generally increased disenchantment with

teachers as students labor over final examinations and term papers, while eagerly anticipating the advent of vacation. Our targeted females may be especially susceptible to such feelings.

Data collected wtth the project specific instrument was not subject to statistical analysis. As the psychometric properties of the instrument are completely unknown, statistical results would be uninterpretable. Instead, the instruments were subjected to qualitative analysis, to determine any changes in response patterns. Protocols completed by 34 students both pre- and post-intervention were analyzed. Substantive changes were observed on items 5-8. At post-intervention assessment, more students reported frequent attendance at the school library (29% vs. 50%). A sharp increase occurred in the proportion of participants reporting ownership of library cards (50% vs. 97%); at post-intervention only one student reported that she did not have a card. At post intervention, all students reported that they liked to read, and could cite a book or magazine by name. This compares to 53% of students reporting such information at the pre-test. Finally, while at pre-test only eight students reported an interest in tutorial assistance (23%), at post-testing, 50% of the students indicated an interest in extra help. Only a small increase was observed in numbers of students who had met the school librarian (56% vs 65%).

The video has not yet been reviewed by students, thus no data is available on student reaction to the material presented. Seven

of the nine advisory committee members participated in the evaluation of the resource guide and video by reviewing the materials, completing an evaluation form and participating in the post-viewing discussion. Responses are rated on a scale of 1 to 7, with higher numbers indicating greater agreement. Means for each of the nine items rated on the evaluation form are presented in Table 2. Two separate means for items five and eight were calculated to account for respondents who indicated that they had no knowledge of other materials available for literacy enhancement programs. Ratings for all nine items indicate that the materials are seen as appropriate, interesting, relevant, and motivating for minority female high school students. Even the lowest of the ratings, item eight, was within the range of agreement. Advisory committee members showed the mildest agreement with the statement that the videotape would serve to motivate young minority females to increase their efforts toward developing more effective literacy skills. Members were in strongest agreement that the videotape was understandable to secondary school females with limited literacy skills.

The evaluation form requested narrative responses in order to generate more specific feedback on the content and quality of the curriculum materials. As strengths identified for the video, respondents mentioned the presence of minority females as professional librarians, the use of amateur young people ("makes the action more natural and the students more like the girls who

will actually view the tape"), the depiction of the library as a friendly, informal place, and the practical information presented on how to use the library to assist in solving real-life problems (learning about the process of acquiring citizenship). Twenty-nine percent of respondents saw no weaknesses in the videotape. The weaknesses cited included the need for professional actors to give the scenes a more realistic look, the need for more didactic instruction on how to use the card catalog and computer reference terminals, and the lack of focus on the Spanish and other foreign language materials available. Though narrative responses indicate some disagreements among the advisory committee on the strengths and weaknesses of the video, overall tne identification of weaknesses centered on specific topics which could be included in future materials rather than existing portions of the video which needed to be altered or eliminated.

Among the strangths identified for the resource guide, respondents consistently cited excellent organization of information, comprehensive content, and clear explanations couched in informal language. Respondents mentioned that many of the pages were appropriate for duplication and use as activity worksheets in their present form. Fifty seven percent of the advisory committee saw no weaknesses in the teachers' resource guide. All of the weaknesses cited indicated a need for even more information if possible, including more lists of resources, more pages of specific activities to be completed in intervention sessions, and detailed

lesson plans telling teachers exactly what steps to follow when using the materials. The teacher's resource guide is seen by the advisory committee as an excellent tool for use by professionals in the field of literacy enhancement. However, there is some evidence that it lacks sufficiently detailed guidelines and structure for those who may be unsure of how to proceed with a program of literacy enhancement for minority females.

Based on experience gained from this project, two recommendations can be made regarding programs designed to enhance literacy skills.

O **There is a need to consider the total school instructional climate when designing and implementing special programs.** Our data suggests the possibility that females exposed to this intervention became less satisfied with the quality of classroom instruction and attention available to them. Though there are alternative interpretations for the data, as previously mentioned, one must consider the need to enhance the level of multicultural awareness and understanding on the part of all school staff. On a school campus undergoing dramatic demographic changes, as is the case with Santa Monica High School, some staff may be unprepared for the added demands of meeting the needs of culturally different and language minority youngsters in the context of the regular curriculum. Special programs such as this one should not be confined to supplementary materials and presentations offered

outside of the regular class context. Rather, as students are being exposed to a more diverse and motivating range of materials, teachers should be receiving concomitant in-service instruction to assist them in widening the range of their regular curriculum.

O **A greater range of specialized programs could be made available to students by more efficient use of presently unscheduled time.** Students appear willing and eager to participate in activities during lunchtime, as evidenced by the excellent attendance at our presentations. There were no regularly scheduled activities available for the student body as a whole during lunchtime when our program began. Individual teachers and programs, such as Special Education, had services available on an invitation only basis, and the library was open for student use during lunch. Several school staff offered dire predictions for our program when we scheduled our presentations during lunch, suggesting that students would not give up their "free time" for additional school activities. We can only comment that students came, brought their friends, and requested at the final session that we return for the fall semester. A return to the use of lunchtime for meetings of special interest clubs open to all students, peer tutoring sessions for students in need of extra assistance, student leadership and government activities, as well as the kinds of special programs that our intervention represents seems warranted based on our experience.

References

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Harris, A. & Sipay, E. (1990). How to Increase Reading Ability (9th ed.). New York: Longman.

Helmstetter, A. (1987). Year-Long motivation in the 8th grade "reluctant" class. Journal of Reading, 31, 244-247.

Horne, Marcia (1985). Attitudes Toward Handicapped Students. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawerence Erlbaum.

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Lehr, F. (1982). Identifying and assessing reading attitudes. Journal of Reading, 26, 80-83.

TABLE 1

Student Attitude Scores on the Demos D Scale

Variables (N=30)	Mean pre-test (s.d.)	Mean post-test (s.d)	T value (p)
Attitude toward education	16 (3.7)	14.1 (2.8)	3.14 (p=.004)
Attitude toward behavior	11.7 (3.6)	9.4 (2.3)	4.04 (p<.001)
Attitude toward peer/parents	11.3 (1.5)	10 (1.6)	3.18 (p=.003)
Attitude toward teachers	25.4 (2.7)	27.8 (3.3)	3.89 (p=.001)

TABLE 2

STUDENT RESPONSES TO SITE SPECIFIC SURVEY (N=34)

Item Description	pre-test	post-test
visit school library independently	29%	50%
know school librarian	56%	65%
own a card for use at the public library	50%	97%
enjoy reading (cite specific title)	53%	100%
interested in peer tutoring	23%	50%

TABLE 3

Advisory Board Ratings of Video and Guide (N=9)

item description	mean rating (7 point scale)
1. video role models	6.3
2. understandable oral histories on video	6.9
3. interesting video	6.0
4. relevant video	5.9
5. uniqueness of video	5.0 (6.3)*
6. motivational video	5.6
7. useful guide	6.1
8. uniqueness of guide	5.6 (6.8)*
9. well-organized guide	6.4

* Means in parentheses are calculated from scores of only those respondents indicating familiarity with literacy development materials (3 respondents on item 5 and 4 respondents on item 7).

Selected Readings

Acker, Allison. (1988) Honduras: The Making of a Banana Republic. South End Press.

Alegria, Claribel. (1989) Woman of the River. U. of Pittsburg Press.

Argueta, Manlio. (1987) One Day of Life.

Cisneros, Sandra. (1983) The House on Mango Street. Arte Publico Press, U. of Houston.

Fuentes, Carlos. (1988) Myself and Others. Farrar, Strauss, and Ciroux.

Garcia, Guy. (1988) Skin Deep. Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.

Harlan, Judith. (1988) Hispanic Voters: A Voice in American Politics. Watts Press.

Martinez, Julio. (1985) Chicano Literature: A Reference Guide. Greenwood Press.

Martinez, Max. (1988) Schoolland. Arte Publico Press, U. of Houston.

Rodriguez, Richard. (1982) Hunger of Memory. Godine press.

Soto, Gary. (1985) Living Up The Street. Strawberry Hill Press.

Project Read Video Evaluation

After viewing the literacy video and reviewing the accompanying teacher's guide, please circle the number which best represents your response to each statement.

1. The literacy videotape presents minority women who are high achieving role models.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree strongly			don't know			agree strongly

2. The oral history presented in the videotape is understandable to secondary school females possessing limited literacy skills.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree strongly			don't know			agree strongly

3. The videotape presents content which should be interesting to minority secondary school females.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree strongly			don't know			agree strongly

4. The videotape presents content which is relevant to the needs and concerns of minority secondary school females.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree strongly			don't know			agree strongly

5. The videotape is unique among materials presently available to foster literacy development among minority females.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree strongly			don't know			agree strongly

6. The videotape will motivate minority female students to strive to improve both their literacy skills and their school performance.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree strongly			don't know			agree strongly

7. The teacher's guide to accompany the literacy videotape provides useful procedural information which will enhance the presentation of the literacy videotape.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree strongly			don't know			agree strongly

8. The teacher's guide is unique in that it compiles information which is not readily available elsewhere under a single cover.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree strongly			don't know			agree strongly

9. The teacher's guide is well-organized and easy to use.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
disagree strongly			don't know			agree strongly